



Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

Reducing Stigma

Stigma is discrimination against an identifiable group of people, a place, or a nation. Stigma is associated with a lack of knowledge about how COVID-19 spreads, a need to blame someone, fears about disease and death, and gossip that spreads rumors and myths.

No single person or group of people are more likely than others to spread COVID-19. Public health emergencies, such as this pandemic, are stressful times for people and communities. Fear and anxiety about a disease can lead to social stigma, which is negative attitudes and beliefs toward people, places, or things. Stigma can lead to labeling, stereotyping, [discrimination](#), and other negative behaviors toward others. For example, stigma and discrimination can occur when people link a disease, such as COVID-19, with a population, community, or nationality. Stigma can also happen after a person has recovered from COVID-19 or been released from home isolation or quarantine.

Some groups of people who may experience stigma during the COVID-19 pandemic include:

- Certain racial and ethnic minority groups, including Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and black or African Americans;
- People who tested positive for COVID-19, have recovered from being sick with COVID-19, or were released from COVID-19 quarantine;
- Emergency responders or healthcare providers;
- Other frontline workers, such as grocery store clerks, delivery drivers, or farm and food processing plant workers;
- [People who have disabilities](#) or [developmental or behavioral disorders](#) who may have difficulty following recommendations;
- People who have underlying health conditions that cause a cough;
- People living in congregate (group) settings, such as people experiencing homelessness.

Stigma hurts everyone by creating more fear or anger toward ordinary people instead of focusing on the disease that is causing the problem. Stigma can also make people more likely to hide symptoms or illness, keep them from seeking health care immediately, and prevent individuals from adopting healthy behaviors. This means that stigma can make it more difficult to control the spread of an outbreak.

Groups who experience stigma may also experience discrimination. This discrimination can take the form of:

- Other people avoiding or rejecting them;
- Getting denied healthcare, education, housing, or employment;
- Verbal abuse; or
- Physical violence.

Stigma can negatively affect the emotional, [mental](#), and physical health of stigmatized groups and the communities they live in. Stigmatized individuals may experience isolation, depression, anxiety, or public embarrassment. Stopping stigma is important to making *all* communities and community members safer and healthier. Everyone can help stop stigma related to COVID-19 by [knowing the facts](#) and sharing them with others in their communities.

Community leaders and public health officials can help prevent stigma by:

- Maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of those seeking healthcare and those who may be part of any contact investigation.
- Quickly communicating the risk, or lack of risk, from contact with products, people, and places.
- Correcting negative language that can cause stigma by sharing accurate information about how the virus spreads.
- Speaking out against negative behaviors and statements, including those on social media.
- Making sure that images used in communications show diverse communities and do not reinforce stereotypes.
- Using media channels, including news media and social media, to speak out against stereotyping groups of people who experience stigma because of COVID-19.
- Thanking healthcare workers, responders, and others working on the front lines.
- Suggesting virtual resources for [mental health](#) or other social support services for people who have experienced stigma or discrimination.

More information

[A guide to preventing and addressing social stigma associated with COVID-19](#)  

[Protect Yourself and Your Loved Ones During a Disaster](#)

[Pandemic Preparedness Resources](#)

[Frequently Asked Questions on COVID-19](#)